

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Augmenting Deer Population

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Oftentimes in endangered species conservation, we're faced with a situation where you have a small, and vulnerable population of imperiled plants or animals, but you have a large, healthy population elsewhere, or you can successfully propagate and raise them in captivity. In these situations, one of the most basic conservation tools is augmentation – assuming the habitat is okay, you augment the small, vulnerable population with individuals from the large, healthy population, or from those propagated in captivity.

We don't think of white-tail deer as a rare species, but they are more common in some places than others. One place they aren't common is the Qualla Boundary – Cherokee Indian lands in western North Carolina. However, a partnership between the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and North Carolina State Parks is working to address that issue.

In each of the next three years, between 25 and 50 deer will be relocated onto the 56,000-acre Qualla Boundary, in habitat improved for browsing and currently off-limits to hunting. The released deer will primarily be females in small family groups. Initial collections begin in January, with biologists using darts to tranquilize the animals, collecting data on age and health, and fitting each with a tag and radio collar. The deer will be kept in a large pen on the reservation and closely monitored for about four weeks before being released.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peebles.